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HIGHER IDEALS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

I

THE function of secondary schools is distinct in itself and will one day establish its independent right when it has rid itself of the vicious term, and still more vicious idea, college preparation. In the organization and administration of the secondary school there are first to be considered certain technical details, the chief of these are three in number—curriculum, texts, and teaching methods. When these matters have been completely arranged, only the foundation of the true school has been laid. Changing the figure, let us say that it is in the higher ideals of secondary education we are to find the soul and spirit of the school.

I wish to consider first the chief dangers that threaten the higher usefulness of the school. They are three in number.

The first is that the work may become a mere routine of hack work, a mechanical round of stated tasks. There are always certain tendencies in this direction which need to be understood and checked. The student of necessity often fails to see the purpose of his work, the architectural design of the entire structure of his education. To him his work may easily seem an artificial program imposed by the will of those who control—a treadmill made for him. The teacher feels the same tendency for different reasons. A well trained teacher with classes of half grown boys and girls may have his ingenuity taxed by the difficulties he meets in informing listless or dull pupils, but in the contents of his subjects there can be nothing at all commensurate with his mental powers. By training and maturity he is fit to live in a very different range of ideas. He therefore is subject to a constant pressure to let his class work fall to the humdrum level of duties performed, without neglect it is true, but at the same time without heart or enthusiasm. It must be conceded, moreover, if pupils and teachers alike feel this tendency, that there is much in the work of the secondary school

which is a drudgery and a mechanical routine. The task of the school therefore is not simply to counteract a tendency but to create an actual atmosphere of enthusiasm and of spiritual activity which shall vivify and brighten the daily routine of set tasks.

The school here touches, as it touches in all its problems, upon one of the problems of life. If it does its work well in this respect it will be training its boys and girls for the world far more essentially than in any of the courses of its curriculum. In one aspect a large part of life is mechanical and a drudgery ; most men live in assigned tasks and in a routine made either by themselves or by others. This is unavoidable in our modern scheme of society. Men must learn, nevertheless, to create for themselves an atmosphere of freedom and of spiritual independence even if their feet are fast to earth. The importance, therefore, of beginning in the school to develop this broader and more lofty tone of thought is self evident.

How shall the school do the work ? There are three chief methods by which it is to be accomplished. In the first place a penetrating and tireless enthusiasm must be at work in the school. Such a spirit breeds a like and companion feeling in everyone whom it touches. The teacher feels its invigorating power when he finds it in his students ; but the teacher must remember that it is among the solemn duties of his high calling never to fail himself in this respect. If the organization of the school is pervaded with this contagious enthusiasm, all will share in its influence and power. In the second place, as soon as the boy or girl is old enough to study, he is old enough to know why he studies. From time to time therefore, and more than once, he should be told in a plain and simple way what the meaning and value of his education is — told in the same way and in the same terms that teachers tell each other. He should be made to see that his day's work stands on the same basis as that of any man, that it is of value and meaning not in itself but as part of that large whole to which each day contributes its share. In the third place, the teachers in the different departments of the school ought each in turn from time to time to give to the whole body of students simple but carefully prepared and interesting lectures

upon some subject in his own special department. By this the teacher not only accomplishes other things that cannot be considered here, but also interests the students in himself, in his department, and in the work of the department. Since the word interest is the significant part in the result we seek, the value of the system is evident.

The second danger that confronts the school is that it may become a tutoring machine. Many of our public high schools, excellent as they are, are not schools in any true sense, but are merely places where tutoring is carried on upon an elaborate but inexpensive scale. The true school is an organism, every part of which works with every other part. It constitutes a unit of interest and affection in the mind of the pupil. The true school brings to bear upon the student a single powerful influence upon the mind and character, and not a set of various influences of different characters and values. The truth of this principle is felt very strongly with regard to our colleges: it ought to be equally true with regard to our secondary schools.

Perhaps the danger I allude to is not made plain by the mere statement of it, and some explanation is needed. What is meant is that there is always a grave danger that the school may concern itself with merely scholastic matters, ignoring or forgetting the large personal issues which it should share with its students; there is danger that the school may be so loosely organized that the influence of one instructor runs counter to that of another. Many teachers habitually act as if their topics were the only ones of consequence; and indeed it is difficult in any single topic to keep constantly in thought the entire mental constitution of the student.

Now the methods by which the school is to insure itself from this danger and develop the value of an institution in the strong meaning of that term are as follows: In certain important respects there ought to be uniformity of system among the teachers. The student will then have impressed upon his mind the first fundamental principle that all his studies, so called, seek a common end and are part of a large and definitely organized system. In the second place, each teacher should persistently bear in

mind the other school duties of his students; he may do this in a variety of ways, some important and some trivial, but all having an effect upon the mind of the student. He should in his relations with his classes emphasize the fact that he and his work are but part of a large whole. Last, and most important, the school must convince the student by its entire intercourse with him that it is interested in the whole boy or the whole girl, not simply in his mathematical interests or in the mental part of him. This is to be brought about in ways intangible, but no less real. A hearty interest in all that he does, a sincere coöperation with him in his plans and desires when they are right and proper, is sure in the long run to develop in the mind of the boy or girl a feeling and an affection for the school as a whole. It is to be remembered that the activities outside the class room are the ones which determine the strength and vitality of this sentiment.

The third danger which confronts the school is one which has been involved in what has just been said, but it is a matter of so great importance in other respects that more needs to be said concerning it. There is always danger that the school considers its duty done when the boys have left the class room, or when the boy's daily program is completed and the last gong has sounded. It is here that we find the reason for the fact that so few schools have any real hold upon the interests and affections of the boy and girl. The school has an entire and not a partial responsibility—a responsibility which is no doubt shared by parents and others, but which is not to be limited or divided. The statement of the evil states the method by which it is to be met. There is more involved, however, than an active coöperation with the student in all his interests and activities. The school must unite all the life of the boy or girl under one comprehensive rule of sane living and right thinking. There is not one rule for class room and another for athletic field and home. One comprehensive principle governs all, and the boy must learn to take the sportsman's manly enthusiasm into class room and the student's persistence and logic to the athletic field, living everywhere with enthusiasm, unflagging energy, and a high and

gentle courtesy. Some time or other the boy learns to divide his life and to live two existences based upon different principles and conducted according to different rules; one of these is his school life, the other his real or natural life. It is time that Froebel's famous rule is applied to the whole school system. He said: "Come, let us live with our children," and we have tried to apply it to the kindergarten. It is as vitally necessary in the high school and academy. Faithfully followed, it will create a new era of good feeling and true comradeship between those long-descended foes—schoolmaster and schoolboy.

Having considered the chief dangers that confront the school, we now change the point of view somewhat and address ourselves to a brief reflection upon system and methods.

The stimulation and training of boys and girls must proceed through the careful combination of two systems of treatment. Either system unqualified by the other is vicious.

There must in the first place be a system—prescribed duties recurring in a fixed way, and prescribed tasks which are to be performed in a fixed manner. This is the mechanical side of school life, its purely disciplinary aspect. It imposes equal and exact obligations upon all; demands equally from all. It produces sound habits, and strengthens and deepens mental power. Without correction, however, it does not take hold of the real interests and enthusiasm of the student; thus it loses its greatest and most important opportunity.

The corrective of this system is the second method in school conduct. It is the method of personal appeal. It consists of warning, advice, suggestion, entreaty—addressed sometimes to a single student, sometimes to the whole body of students. It seeks to awaken self-respect, stir pride, kindle ambition; it calls upon the reason and the emotions, upon the better virtues and finer instincts of boys and girls. It has the value always possessed by oratory of taking hold upon the enthusiasm and vital interests, and gives the school a grasp upon the will and the heart. The dangerous tendencies of this system are that it shall become weak and ineffective, using entreaty where command is needed, and that it shall consider its duty done with mere talk.

The first method alone makes the school lifeless, the second makes it invertebrate. The first method, unqualified, forfeits for the school the affection of its members; the second forfeits their respect. The true system combines the two into a single well-balanced whole. The law never surrenders, but the personal appeal also never ceases. By this I do not mean constant and fatuous iteration, but a pervading sense in the school that a personal care and interest are at work. It will take many forms besides mere words.

Much of education is well known to lie in admirable methods presented to the mind and attention of the student. No principle is better known, yet it is seldom applied to the school itself as a model of efficiency, precision, and organization. This, however, the best school must be—an actual exemplification of all the virtues it seeks to teach. It is demanded that the student never forgets, never procrastinates, considers all details, masters every emergency. The school has deliberately assumed in this the duties of an organization so complete, so finished, that the student will naturally and inevitably rely upon its absolute excellence and see in it a pattern of the completeness which it teaches.

Thus from every point of view it is plain that the functions of the school are but just begun when its scholastic duties and schoolroom drill are probably completed. In these the boy has come to meet the teacher. In what still remains the teacher must go to meet the boy, for in what I desire now to say I speak of the school life of boys exclusively. All sound conceptions of school duties now include some attention to the sports and athletic interests of students, but it is doubtful whether their full value and educational significance is generally understood. The real boy, the entire boy, is to be found here with all his natural tendencies, good and evil. Even the scholastic virtues of order, system, and, above all, of persistence and industry, are quite as well taught here as in the schoolroom. But beyond this, if a wise control, constant and complete, but friendly and sympathetic, goes into all the sports and games, we will see at once great gains in the higher ranges of morals and manners. Two

things must be remembered with regard to boys and girls both. One is that they demand leadership ; the other is that they cannot create their own ideals. The function of the school will be therefore to furnish the needed leadership, to coöperate with all the good leadership that naturally springs up among boys, and erect and strengthen ideals. The better natures among young men at once respond, while it must always be the teacher's duty to shame the meaner spirits into obedience. They will learn to be good natured, courteous, clean, and self-restrained in speech, valuing many things above brute strength and mere victory.

I have alluded to the traditional antagonism between schoolmaster and schoolboy. Of all the virtues of the best schools the greatest is the substitution of a cordial understanding and mutual consideration for this hereditary estrangement. The partial systems of the past are to give way to the new and catholic spirit which will be adequate to all the immense opportunity of the future. We can never go beyond Froebel's law.

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